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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970 Census Report states that children under 14 years of age comprise 23.4% of the population, the Committee on Children's Television (CCT) feels that television broadcasters have an obligation to determine and serve the needs of these children. After examining the 1971 license renewal applications of four of the five San Francisco Bay Area commercial television stations, CCT concluded that none of the applications show station-initiated efforts to specifically measure the needs or interests of the children in the Bay Area. CCT recommends that stations take immediate steps to ascertain these needs, to design programs to meet these needs, to insure that members of the community will be given an opportunity to participate in the development of these programs, and to utilize fully the resources available in the community for the development of programs. Further, they recommend that the Federal Communications Commission consider the possibility of designing a special section of the television license application which refers to children specifically. A series of statements made by educators, administrators, and parents expressing concern about the effects of television on children concludes the report. (SH)

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TELEVISION AND CHILDREN'S NEEDS

A report prepared by
The Committee on Children's Television
1511 Masonic Avenue
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EM 009 196

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THE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S TELEVISION has been formed to promote better television programming for children. The Committee grew out of the increasing community awareness that television is an overwhelming influence on the lives of children, and that the potential of the medium is largely untapped and does not reflect sufficient empathy for the needs of children.

CCT AIMS

...to PERSUADE the telvision industry that children represent a substantial viewing audience and are entitled to entertaining programming designed to meet their special needs and interests.

...to PROMOTE good quality, locally produced children's programming that reflects the rich cultural diversity of the San Francisco Bay Area.

...to EXPLORE a new system of finacial support for children's programs by commercial underwriting and public service funding

...to ENCOURAGE more cooperative efforts between all broadcasters serving the area in order that a reasonable amount of programming be made available for children of differing ages daily.

...to ASSURE that the rights of the public to quality programming, as contained in broadcasting laws and regulations, are exercised, and that the rights of children who are unable to petition for themselves are invoked

The 1970 Census Report states that out of a total San Francisco/ Oakland metropolitan area population of 3,109,519, there are 726,367 children under 14 years of age. A review of the 1971 License Renewal Applications of the Bay Area commercial television stations reveals that this significant segment (23.4%) has been almost totally ignored by the stations in their research to determine the needs and interests of the community.

One of the requirements which the Federal Communications Commission places on television broadcasters is that they "ascertain", through methods such as interviews, surveys and consultations, the "needs and interests" of the communities which they serve. This is part of the broader requirement of the Communications Act of 1934 that, since the airwaves are public property, all stations must operate in the public interest.

The Committee on Children's Television feels that to truly serve the needs of children, television broadcasters must first determine those needs. This report documents the failure of Bay Area commercial television stations to include the needs of children in their ascertainment process. After outlining reccomendations for ways in which children's needs should be researched, the report concludes with a compilation of statements from concerned professionals and individuals. The statements, on the subject of children and television, are representative of the broad community concern and commitment which the stations have failed to reflect in their License Renewal Applications.

KTVU-TV, Channel 2

The 1971 License Renewal Application which Cox Broadcasting Company has submitted for KTVU offers no indication that the station has made any effort to ascertain the needs of the children of the Bay Area. In fact, there are very few references to children at all in the entire application, although the station devotes a significant portion of its schedule to programs directed to children.

Section IV-B, Part Ib of the application refers to the station's meeting with CCT and also refers to a meeting with S. I. Hayakawa in which "a possible series by Dr. Hayakawa on a children's program" is mentioned. A later section of the license mentions a one hour special program "Winnie the Pooh" which was put on by the station, and also includes a promotional press release regarding awards won by "Romper Room" which is run by the station on weekday mornings. There is no indication that the station has solicited input from the community in developing programs specifically for the children of Oakland, the station's city of license, nor is there any indication that the station has made efforts to use the resources in the community for development of regularly scheduled children's programming.

Despite the need expressed in the meetings with CCT and with Dr. Hayakawa, the station proposes no new programs for children. In the Past Programming section of the application, several letters from the public are included in response to a program called "Cousin Wash" which was produced by the station and shown once during the summer. CCT feels that the measuring of audience response is one method a station could use as part of a program to research community feelings on children's needs. Again we were disappointed to find no indication in the application that the letters would be used for this purpose.

KBHK-TV, Channel 44

The 1971 License Renewal Application which Kaiser Broadcasting Company has submitted for KBHK gives no indication that any specific program of ascertainment was undertaken for the needs of children, although like KTVU the station directs a large proportion of its programs to children. The station does, however, propose to produce a local program for children.

In Section IV-B, Part Ic of its application, the station states that it is working on the production of a bilingual program for Spanish-speaking children. "Through its ascertainment process," the application states, "the applicant has become aware of the need for bilingual educational instruction for members of the Spanish-speaking community." The proposal goes on to describe the ways in which a program of this type could help to alleviate the difficulties of Spanish-speaking Americans. Although very little specific information about the program is given, the application states that it would be developed in cooperation with several community agencies and probably draw on resource people from the community.

CCT feels that the basic concept of the proposal is good, both because it involves drawing on the available resources in the community and because it involves a specific program to answer a specific need of Bay Area children. However, CCT questions very strongly whether or not the station seriously intends to develop the program. CCT questions why, if the program is under development, it was not mentioned by General Manager Carlo Anneke in his meeting with CCT on July 20, 1971. CCT also notes the following statement which concludes Part Ic of the application: "the applicant wishes to emphasize again that the proposed projects outlined in this Exhibit may not come into

realization whould the applicant fail to achieve an economically viable status." As has been stated in an earlier report, CCT feels that the holder of a broadcast license has a responsibility to adequately serve all segments of the public regardless of his ability to make a profit.

KGO-TV, Channel 7

As with other stations, KGO's License Renewal Application makes no mention of any station-initiated effort to specifically measure the needs of the children of the Bay Area. There are, however, several references in the application to children, and the station also proposes a locally-produced program for children.

Section IV-B, Part 1b of the application states "The increasing awareness that better programs must be developed for children has stimulated the creation of programs which hopefully entertain young viewers at the same time that they offer instruction." Although this "increasing awareness" may be a good thing, CCT doubts that programs which truly serve children's needs can be developed in the absence of efforts to determine those needs.

In Part 1c of the same section, the station proposes the production of a program called "Field Trip." The program will be for 6 to 12 year olds and consist of "filmed visits to places of interest" with a question session in the studio afterwards. Although it is significant that the station has proposed to do a local program, the application does not indicate any plans to draw on community resources in producing the program, nor does it indicate what, if any, specific needs will be served by the program.

KPIX-TV, Channel 5

Again, the License Renewal Application submitted by Westinghouse Broadcasting Company for KPIX offers no indication that the station made any effort to specifically ascertain the needs of children. The application does mention the station's meetings with CCT and also the program "Feed Them On Your Dreams" which the station aired on the subject of the need for improvements in children's television programming.

Despite the absence of any ascertainment concerning children's needs, the application does include the following statement: "KPIX believes that the need exists for high quality and stimulating television programming designed especially for the children of the Bay Area". The application proposes that by "early 1972" the station will be airing a locally produced program for children that will "contribute to development by expanding knowledge of the surrounding area" and will embody "new and innovative approaches to local children's programming techniques."

In an earlier report, CCT mentioned that KPIX General Manager William Osterhaus had told the Committee that the station had no interest in producing a local program for children. Thus CCT was surprised to learn that the station proposed to do a program in its license application. In a meeting on September 10, 1971 Mr. Osterhaus told CCT that it was "for competitive reasons" that he did not tell the Committee about their program plans before the information became public on September 2nd. He later said that there were things in the station's renewal application which he did not want the other stations to know about prior to September 2nd so he had chosen to be "secretive and bite the bullet". CCT questions what "competitive reasons" were so strong that the station considered them more important than being open and honest with members of the community. CCT also feels that another possible reason for our not being informed of the

station's plans earlier is that the decision to produce a local program was made at some time after our initial meetings with station management.

Despite the above questions, however, CCT recognizes KPIX's willingness to utilize community resources in the development of a local program. At the September 10th meeting, Mr. Osterhaus agreed to prepare a written statement concerning the way in which the station's local program would be developed. However, it was not until he had received a press release concerning this report that he sent a letter to CCT, by messenger, which stated that the program would be developed through "meetings with many people from the Bay Area who are interested in children and how television might be used to serve their special needs".

KRON-TV, Channel 4

Because of yet unresolved legal action concerning its 1968 License Renewal Application, KRON does not have an application for 1971. Thus CCT has no way of evaluating the station's efforts to ascertain the needs of children.

Over a period of two weeks, CCT attempted through telephone calls and conta with station employees to reach management representatives and give them the opportunity to make a statement regarding the station's ascertainment policies. When finally contacted by CCT, Station President Aldo Constant said that he wou be unable to make a statement without first consulting his attorneys. As of this writing, CCT has received no statement from him.

Recommendations

CCT feels that it is entirely within the spirit of the Communications Act of 1934, by which all broadcasting is regulated, to expect that television licensees will ascertain the needs and interests of children under 14 as well as those of adults. Since this has not been done by any station, CCT recommends that stations take immediate steps to:

1) specifically ascertain the needs of children in three age groups (Pre-school 2-5, Primary 6-9, and Elementary 10-12). This could be done both through surveys of children themselves and through interviews and consultations with professionals concerned with children, parents and others.

2) design programs to specfically meet the needs of children in each group.

3) insure that members of the community will be given an opportunity to participate in the development of programs to serve their children's needs.

4) utilize fully the resources available in the community for the development of programs.

Part of the reason that stations have failed to ascertain the needs of children lies in the fact that the Commission has never explicitly required them to do so. Therefore, we further recommend that as part of the pending FCC inquiry into children's television, the Commission consider the possibility of designing a special section of the television license application which refers to children specifically.

Part II

An Expression of Concern

Mary B. Lane, Professor of Education, San Francisco State College

"Television for children today is for the most part harmful---harmful because it feeds children a diet so spiced with grusome horrors, doubtful motivations, and unreal monstrosities that a more wholesome diet loses its attractiveness; harmful because the child viewers are tantalized with all the materialistic goods of a too affluent culture. TV makes the job of helping children to become discriminating and to develope good taste a thousand-fold more difficult.

In addition to being harmful, TV, with the exception of one or two educational programs, is missing a tremendous opportunity of presenting to the youth of our country the great diversity of people and of cultures which makes the United States unique."

Dr. Arthur Berger, Professor of Social Science, S. F. State College

"Television has not come anywhere near realizing its fantastic potential. What we have in television is the most powerful mechanism for teaching, for expanding our experience and understanding of the world, and for affecting behavior, and it is all thrown away because of commercial considerations in a large measure. Children's Television, in particular, is an offender, for it is permeated with violence, encourages passivity, and is creating a generation of cynics, who learn that the ads don't tell the truth and tend to extrapolate this bit of wisdom and end up not trusting in anyone---perhaps not even in themselves. Children's television has a special obligation, because of the

Dr. Arthur Berger--continued

particular vulnerability of youngsters, to be a service to them, to stimulate their imaginations and help them grow.

I would suggest that the following changes might be useful if we wish to fully exploit television's vast possibilities for being a constructive element in the socialization of children: There should be much more programming for children, and for children of varying ages. Children from 8 to 12 should be considered as well as younger ones. All children are curious and eager to learn about the world; this curiosity should not be deadened, the way it tends to be in most children's programming.

I think that program formats should be developed in which children participate more than they do now. . . this participation should involve the cast of the programs as well as children in the audience. Otherwise children get the idea that they 'have a right' to turn on a knob and be entertained, while not doing anything themselves. And they also get the notion(if programs are dominated by adults) that adults should somehow 'entertain' children---that that is part of the relationship.

I would also not have programs interrupted with advertising; I don't know if it is possible to eliminate advertising completely, but the most I would allow would be before and after programs. I would also make certain that commercials do not manipulate children by giving them unrealistic expectations."

Michael Shapiro, San Francisco Coordinator, Children's Television Workshop

"Television has always been---theoretically at least---in the public dominion. In actuality, of course, the public in general has always been on the receiving end with very little access to programming and production. This is true among white middle class communities but even to a greater degree among the other cultures and communities in our nation. Non-white and non-English speaking communities particularly have found themselves with little or no access to the media.

This situation is even more acute when children's programming is analysed. The direction and mode of almost all children's television programs show little or no regard to the child's emotional, educational, or cultural needs. Although much can be done on a national level regarding the meeting of these needs, much must be done locally. For in the final analysis the greatest degree of flexibility and access can be provided by local community television stations. Such efforts, taken on collectively by cooperating Bay Area stations or by individual stations offer the most relevant hope for immediate action."

Miriam Levy, Consultant and Author

"As a consultant on innovative programs for children and families in the ghetto, I have observed over a number of years, with increasing alarm, the negative effects of the enormous amount of of time almost all of these children spend watching television.

Miriam Levy--continued

Although perhaps the more advantaged children watch television less because there are more options for them to take advantage of programs and facilities, studies are clear that they, too, are being victimized by the shoddy quality and violence spewed forth daily.

The long hours of the day when children are out of school and those lengthening bedtime hours, as well as those hours when children too young or otherwise unable to attend day care or pre-schools are at home, are the vacuums which determine our future. Whether or not we agree with 'Skinnerism' and the concept of behavioral technology, about which I have the gravest reservations, we do know that we have already been conditioning our children, our future, negatively. The question remains as to whether or not we have mortgaged ourselves and our children to advertising and the conditioning which it is offering, or can we through policy and programming set the conditions for creativity and constructiveness?

The answer, obviously in my opinion, is yes. We have the capacity to accomplish this and speedily."

Rev. George C. Conklin, Jr., Director, Television and Community Proj
N. California Conference, United Church of Christ

". . . Young people and television are great resources. I have worked with young people, in many different situations, for more than 20 years. They excite me as they explore new ideas, new

Rev. George Conklin--continued

relationships and new understandings. I have worked with television for some 15 years. Each new artistic or technological development excites me. In a little over 20 years we have seen a quantum jump in man's ability to be in touch with others---around the world and even to the moon. It is tragic that we have used a technological resource to manipulate our greatest resource our youth. Television too long has suggested to them that violence can resolve problems, that happiness can be found in a toy or a pill, that the world is essentially white middle class. The potential of television to help our youth learn and grow to maturity is most exciting, it must be realized!"

Mrs. Marian Hampton, Parent

"My major complaint about children's television has to do with commercials: the television industry has allowed advertising to children of nutririonally unsound foods---of this we are all aware. And some of us are aware that irresponsibility to our children is taking place on a subtler level as well: here in America, the land of self-perpetuating institutions, advertising for children's television has created the self-perpetuating toy, the Barbie doll whose clothes eventually cost more than the child's own, and the little motorized cars which go out of style every year and break down on a ratio equal to the real thing. Children are thus prepared for the adult consumer world of getting and spending, where the basic enjoyments are wearing clothes

and buying new cars. Our children have become a carefully prepared market.

These commercials are discriminatory in establishing status symbols for children living in very different economic situations; the commercials also tend to be more energetic and artful than the pallid programs they accompany, thus an even more subtle level of collusion by contract is established.

As far as programming is concerned, it seems to me that the real issue is the contimual servicing by the television industry of only one level of understanding in children. Our children are different---they have different needs and wants. And the same child has different needs at different times. Just as many parents are seeking diversification in cultural experiences and in educational services for their children. so they are uneasy about the undiversified approach of children's television offerings.

If television for children could be treated as an informational medium, rather than as a commercial medium, many of the problems we parents are concerned about would vanish, and a whole new era of respect for humanity could be ushered into societ, via the media. Perhaps this might even spur the television industry to see <u>adults</u> as human beings, rather than as consumers!"

Joseph Hartog,M.D., Chairman, Committee on Children and Youth, San Francisco Association for Mental Health

"The Committee on Children and Youth respectfully urges the FCC to consider guide lines which would provide a greater diversity of programming and the elimination of frequent hard-sell commercial pressure upon children through television.

We specifically recommend: (1) That children's programs be increased in number and be oriented toward helping children achieve a more realistic understanding of like to prepare them to face life's problems. The present over emphasis on cartoon fantasy and violence hardly serve that need. (2) That all daytime commercials for proprietary drugs and medications be eliminated from television. The tone and philosophy of such commercials suggest simplistically that if one has a problem, one should take a pill. A recent commercial even showed a woman taking a sleeping pill because she was worried about her bridge game. Children who receive a large part of their education from television, in effect, are being taught to become drug addicts. Since children watch television throughout the day, the restriction must cover the entire day. (3) That commercials for rich carbohydrate and nutrionally empty foods be eliminated from children's programming. Again, the harmful education has long range detrimental effects. Scientific studies have demonstrated that poor material nutrition during pregnancy increases the chances for a baby to be born with various birth defects. . . Television must not continue to perpetrate these destructive nutritional habits."

Bobby Thompson, Parent

"If the 60's have been anything, they have been a decade of enlightenment. The mass media, television in particular, has been partly responsible. I find it inexcusable, therefore, that while in some areas television becomes the inescapable eye of truth, in all other respects it remains the senile old grandfather promulgating all the half-truths, stereotypes and lies of past decades.

This is particularly true in the case of so-called children's television. The question to me is: What are our children worth. And the answer is obvious. We who are fighting for truth in education can no longer ignore the one-eyed monster that sits in our living rooms dehumanizing our children. The battle of the 70's is transforming that little window into the eye of truth."